

CONNECTIONS

Literature Past and Present

Modern-day Odyssey

The *Odyssey* recounts the trials and adventures of Odysseus. Two decades is a long time to be away from home, dependent on the whims of the gods and facing dangers in battle with men and monsters. Still, risk has its rewards, and ultimately the story has a happy ending.

In April 1970, the three-man crew of the *Apollo 13* spacecraft embarked on a modern-day odyssey to the moon. Like Odysseus, they set out with a spirit of anticipation and adventure. But the exploration of space has its own perils. On the third day of their mission, just as they were getting ready to sleep in the command module nicknamed *Odyssey*, an onboard oxygen tank ruptured. After several nerve-racking days, the crew finally managed to return safely to Earth. In this case, survival was the ultimate reward. The following excerpt from one astronaut's narrative describes the moment when the gas leak was first discovered.

Lost Moon

The Perilous Voyage of **Apollo 13**

Jim Lovell
and
Jeffrey Kluger



"It looks to me," Lovell told the ground uninflectedly, "that we are venting something." Then, for impact, and perhaps to persuade himself, he repeated: "We are venting something into space."

"Roger," Lousma responded in the mandatory matter-of-factness of the Capcom, "we copy your venting."

"It's a gas of some sort," Lovell said.

"Can you tell us anything about it? Where is it coming from?"

"It's coming out of window one right now, Jack," Lovell answered, offering only as much detail as his limited vantage point provided.

The understated report from the spacecraft tore through the control room like a bullet.

"Crew thinks they're venting something," Lousma said to the loop at large.

"I heard that," Kranz said.

"Copy that, Flight?" Lousma asked, just to be sure.

"Rog," Kranz assured him. "O.K. everybody, let's think of the kinds of things we'd be venting. GNC, you got anything that looks abnormal on your system?"

"Negative, Flight."

"How about you, EECOM? You see anything with the instrumentation you've got that could be venting?"

"That's affirmed, Flight," Liebergot said, thinking, of course, of oxygen tank two. If a tank of gas is suddenly reading empty and a cloud of gas is surrounding the spacecraft, it's a good bet the two are connected, especially if the whole mess had been preceded by a suspicious, ship-shaking bang. "Let me look at the system as far as venting is concerned," Liebergot said to Flight.

"O.K., let's start scanning," Kranz agreed. "I assume you've called in your backup EECOM to see if we can get some more brain power on this thing."

"We got one here."

"Rog."

The change on the loop and in the room was palpable. No one said anything out loud, no one declared anything officially, but the controllers began to recognize that Apollo 13, which had been launched in triumph just over two days earlier, might have just metamorphosed from a brilliant mission of exploration to one of simple survival.

Connecting Literature Past and Present

1. How would you have reacted to the discovery of the oxygen leak?
2. Did the astronauts deal with adversity in a manner similar to Odysseus? If not, how did they differ?
3. Do the roles played by the gods have any type of counterpart in the account of the flight of *Apollo 13*? Explain

Jim Lovell

(b. 1928)



Jim Lovell was a test pilot for U.S. Navy fighter aircraft before joining the space program as an astronaut. Lovell

was the first man to rendezvous two spacecraft and to journey twice to the moon. He coauthored this account of the harrowing journey of *Apollo 13*'s three-man crew.

Jeffrey Kluger

(b. 1954)

Jeffrey Kluger, a senior writer for *Time* magazine, frequently writes on science and space issues. With *Apollo 13* astronaut Jim Lovell, he coauthored the book *Lost Moon*, which served as the basis for the Ron Howard film about the mission.